

Washington, DC — The fiscal year 2004 Department of Defense (DoD) Appropriations bill passed last week includes \$5 million requested by Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) for critical funding to clean up unexploded ordnance (UXO) on military sites throughout the country. UXO includes bombs, missiles, and landmines that have been used for combat or training but did not explode or which have been buried for disposal.

“By providing a constant, substantial source of funding for UXO cleanup research and development, we will be able to implement new technologies that will ultimately make it less expensive and more efficient to clean up this pollution in the United States and throughout the world,” Blumenauer said. “The presence of ordnance and explosives on former military sites limits our use of millions of acres, whether it’s prime real estate or scenic open space.”

The extra \$5 million requested by Blumenauer was added by the conferees of the DoD Appropriations bill last week. This funding, which was included in the Army UXO Research and Development Account, will go far in helping the Defense Department develop new technologies to clean up UXO.

During debate earlier this year, Blumenauer highlighted the dangers from UXO to our troops. In late June, a constituent of Blumenauer’s was killed in Iraq while clearing landmines. Recent press reports have attributed several other U.S. fatalities and numerous injuries in Iraq to landmines or UXO. Fifteen U.S. soldiers have been killed in or wounded by landmines since military operations in Afghanistan began in 2001. Landmines also caused approximately 30 percent of US casualties in the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Blumenauer also argued that UXO threatens civilians around the world, including here in the U.S. A longtime champion of the cleanup of UXO and military toxics, Blumenauer has argued that Congress and the Department of Defense have been too slow in responding to this enormous problem. Last year, Blumenauer successfully inserted language in the DoD Authorization bill requiring the agency to release an inventory of UXO sites around the U.S. The Defense Department has estimated that the cost of cleaning up UXO on already-closed ranges and operational ranges could be as much as \$104 billion.

“Our troops face the dangers caused by UXO every day, not only overseas but here at home,” Blumenauer said. “Unexploded ordnance, which can kill our military personnel and civilians alike, is not just a remote danger in some far off land. This bill provides the funds to start the clean up that’s long overdue.”